

An Examination of Primary School Teachers' Attitudes Toward Engaging in Assessment for Learning

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What is AfL?

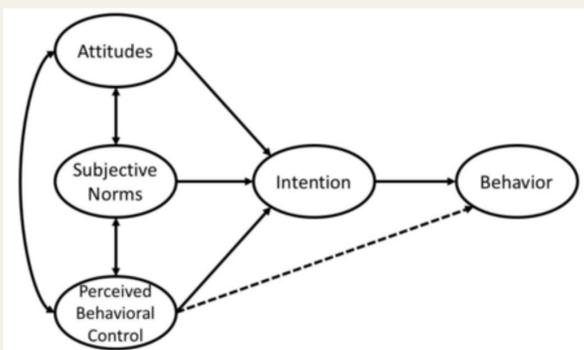
- Assessment for learning (AfL) is a methodology currently being used by teachers in the Republic of Ireland to guide their use of formative assessment practices.
- AfL involves the teacher continuously collecting information about what the students are learning through strategies such as questioning, discussion and self-assessment.
- Research has shown that AfL has numerous benefits such as promoting independent learning and encouraging differentiation.
- Little is known, however, about the role of teacher attitudes, subjective norms and self-efficacy in their engagement of formative assessment practices..

Critique of Previous Studies/ Rationale for the Present Study:

- Previous studies found that positive teacher attitude and self-efficacy underpin teachers' implementation of AfL (Yan et al.,2021; Heitink et al., 2016; Box et al., 2015). However, Yan and Cheng (2015), found that subjective norm and self-efficacy were significant predictors of teachers' intentions to conduct formative assessments.
- Therefore, it is evident that inconsistencies exist in previous research. Additionally, there is a cultural and methodological gap as no study was conducted in an Irish context or adopted a qualitative approach.
- Furthermore, several researchers have highlighted the necessity for future research to be conducted (Yan et al.,2021; Heitink et al., 2016; Box et al., 2015).

Theoretical Framework:

- The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) proposes that behavioural intention is determined by behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs and perceived behavioural control (self-efficacy) (Ajzen, 1991; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Yan et al., 2021).
- Behavioural beliefs refer to ones' attitude towards performing the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).
- Normative beliefs refer to the subjective norms of the individual which are the perceived social pressure from significant others to perform (or not perform) the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). For example, according to Yan and Cheng, (2015), the subjective norms of primary school teachers include education officials, the principal of the school, parents of the students, colleagues and the students themselves.
- Perceived behavioural control refers to one's perception of the difficulty of and control over performing the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In literature, perceived behavioural control is often referred to as an individuals' self-efficacy (Izci, 2016).
- Generally, those with a favourable attitude, positive subjective norms, and high level of self-efficacy will more likely have the intention to perform the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).
- In many previous studies, the TPB has served as a useful framework in predicting teachers' intentions of engaging in assessment practices (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013, Yan 2014; Yan et al., 2021).



(Sansom, 2022).

Method

- This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore primary school teachers' attitudes, self-efficacy and subjective norms towards engaging in assessment for learning (AfL).
- Participants comprised of 6 primary school teachers, from 5 different primary schools, recruited using convenience sampling,
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted online via MS teams.
- A thematic analysis was used to interpret the data.

Results

- All participants possessed strong behavioral intentions to engage in AfL.
- Additionally, each participant expressed strong normative beliefs toward AfL and highlighted the role of their principal and colleagues in inspiring their use of assessment practices.
- However, the majority of participants had negative attitudes and low self-efficacy toward AfL which is inconsistent with previous findings.



(‘Getting Started With Assessment for Learning”, 2022)

Discussion

Why do Irish primary school teachers have low self-efficacy toward AfL in comparison to teachers in other countries?

- New and challenging concept (Swan & Burkhardt, 2014).
- Lack of professional development.(Muskin, 2017).
- Teachers' years of teaching experience contributes to their level of self-efficacy (Leng, 2020).

Why do Irish primary school teachers have negative attitudes toward AfL in comparison to teachers in other countries?

- Common misconceptions include:
 - Teachers using AfL will lose control of their class.
 - Peer feedback means students chatting to each other
 - Summative assessments are the only assessment type that matter.
- (“Getting started with Assessment for Learning“, 2022)

What implications do low self-efficacy and negative attitudes have on AfL practices?

- Lysaght and O’Leary, (2013) describe that teacher beliefs about assessment and their role as an assessor determine the quality of formative assessment.
- Consequently, it is possible that many Irish primary school teachers are implementing AfL incorrectly which results in students in Ireland missing out on the substantial benefits of AfL.

How do subjective norms influence teachers to engage in formative assessment practices?

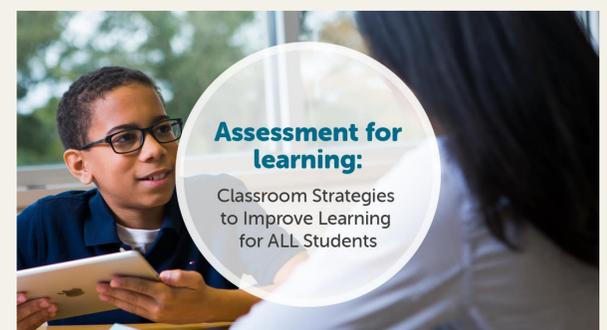
- Previous research states that a positive school environment, encouraging school policies and a large amount of school support are necessary for teachers to conduct AfL (Yang & Cheng, 2021).

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

Limitation:	How future research can address this limitation:
Participation bias.	Only provide limited information to the participants.
Interviews conducted online which are often unreliable (Latkovikj & Popovska, 2020).	Interviews should take place in person.
Primary school teachers only.	Study should be replicated in a secondary school context.

Conclusion:

Fundamentally, this psychological research makes a significant contribution to the educational field as it highlights the need for schools to have a significant support-system in place to encourage the implementation of AfL. Additionally, the present study highlights the necessity for more professional development on assessment strategies to be made available to Irish primary school teachers to enhance their self-efficacy and attitudes toward AfL.



(Cooper, 2019)

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